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# Starting or Expanding an Out-of-School Program: Five Steps to Starting Something New

National Institute on Out-of-School Time

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# Starting or Expanding an Out-of-School Program:

## Five Steps to Starting Something New

**Step I: Perceive the Need** (a whole program to be created, parent involvement to be increased, a homework component to be added, community volunteers to be recruited, environment to be improved, etc.)

### **Step II: Connect with Others**

- Find others who share your concerns and/or have resources you need.
- Develop a task force or planning committee that is broad based, reflective of your community and action oriented.

### **Step III: Conduct a Needs Assessment**

- Establish the purpose of your needs assessment: to see what's needed, to involve important players, provide useful information for the planning process.
- Establish a time frame for completing your assessment process.
- Collect information: find out what already exists, what people like, what they want and need that doesn't exist.
  - Decide whose input you really need (Children? Parents? OST staff?).
  - Research existing programs and models.
  - Develop questions
  - Prepare a survey and distribute it to targeted "customers."
  - Hold "forum" discussions to talk about needs.

### **Step IV: Utilize Information Gathered to Design a Program or Component**

- Review information and establish whether there is enough need, whether your idea for what you wanted to start matches real needs, whether you need to adjust original ideas to match up with needs.
- Use needs assessment process to find out who your greatest supporters are, then involve them in the planning process.
- With your planning team, design your program or new program component based on results of needs assessment. Needs assessments should help you determine:
  - Goals
  - Time frame
  - Logistics
  - Personnel to be involved
  - Financing necessary

NSLC  
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Scotts Valley, CA 95066

### **Step V: Formulate an Action Plan**

- Develop an action plan including specific steps to be taken, target dates and names of people responsible for each step.
- Make sure responsibilities are clear and follow up regularly.
- Review action plan regularly and revise as necessary.
- Market your new program or component. Devise strategies for spreading the word about what you are doing.

## GETTING STARTED: A GUIDE TO ORGANIZING AN AFTER-SCHOOL PROGRAM

If you're a parent, teacher, day care director, school administrator, or service group volunteer, or if you're simply interested in the well-being of youth, you probably know at least one child that you want to help provide opportunities for learning, social interaction, creative expression, and just plain fun.

Where do you look for allies in planning after-school programs? And how do you mobilize the people and resources of your community to make it all possible?

There is no "correct" way to help all the children, no recipe for guaranteed success. No single institution in American society can or should take on the tasks of caring for school-age children during the days and hours when school is closed and parents are at work.

This puts us all at an open door to the creative contributions of many different groups and individuals, all working together to build comfortable and appropriate after-school environments for school-age children.

This Technical Assistance Paper will take you on a guided tour of a process for getting an after-school program started. By following these general guidelines, caring people have developed the support, the resources, and the local commitment to improve the outlook for school-age children in their communities. You can do it too.

### PHASE 1:

#### THE CALL TO ACTION

To start, you'll want to get in touch with others who share your perception of a pressing, unmet demand for organized services. Thus, the first step is the formation of a planning committee, also known as an **action group**.

Think creatively and inclusively about those who might already be interested.

At different times in various communities, the YMCA, YWCA, Boys and Girls Clubs, Camp Fire Boys and Girls Council, League of Women Voters, city chambers of commerce, and Junior League have all played parts in developing programs.

As you begin your inquiries, you may find one or more collaborative after-school programs initiatives already underway in your community. If the planners seem responsible and committed, you may not want to duplicate their process. Instead join them in their efforts. Remember that the key is always collaboration. If no one has yet begun the process in your community, the first step may be yours. For help, contact your local Child Care Resource and Referral Agency (CCR&R).

As you begin to organize your thinking and planning process, you will want a copy of the most recent licensing regulations applicable to school-age care programs

### PHASE 2:

#### CARRY A CANARI (*Community Assessment of Need and Resource Instrument*)

Most working parents of school-agers don't need to be convinced that communities offer too few excellent and affordable after-school services. Other important potential partners - such as mayors, city council members, school board members, school superintendents, and business leaders - may ask for some kind of demonstrable proof that such a demand exists.

To meet this requirement, start with a look at demographic data that has already been collected. Your local library carries the current edition of the *U.S. Census of Population and Housing* which contains

pertinent information about your area - such as the number of children by age group or the income characteristics of working parents. Check with your Resource & Referral Agency for other relevant information.

Then, using the knowledge you gain from these sources, you can put together a Community Assessment of Need and Resource Instrument, otherwise known as *CANARI*.

A public interest survey is a way to convince local policy makers of the general demand for after-school programs. You can also convert the survey results into a press release and perhaps attract some publicity for your initiative or provide service planners with invaluable information to aid service design.

Depending on the geography of your area and the type of community you wish to survey, a *CANARI* can involve:

- A printed questionnaire
- Telephone interviews.
- A door-to-door survey
- A PTO meeting
- A congregational gathering
- An e-mail inquiry
- Any combination of these.

See Figure 1 for a sample of the printed questionnaire. It is important to keep in mind that *the success of your CANARI depends heavily on whether or not it addresses your local community's values*. Therefore, we suggest that you appropriately modify the sample questionnaire.

Any veteran of the printed questionnaire method will tell you that distributing surveys is the easy part. It is usually more of a challenge to get people to complete and return the questionnaires. If your return rate sinks too low, the results may be too sparse to be of any use.

Therefore, in addition to recognizing local community values, do everything possible to keep your *CANARI* questions brief, direct, to the point, and simple to answer. This way, you'll be able to compile, analyze, and summarize your results with greater ease.

If you decide to go with a printed

questionnaire-style *CANARI*, be sure to add a cover letter that explains who you are and why you're asking such personal questions.

In your cover letter, make clear that the *CANARI* is purely a gauge of current public sentiment, not a promise of any kind. Also include the name and phone number of at least one contact person, and don't forget to communicate some urgency with your deadline for returns.

To assist with *CANARI* distribution and retrieval, or simply to lend their name and credibility to a cover letter, you may wish to invite participation from:

- Cooperative Extension Service--  
*Child Care Resource and Referral Agencies, local government*
- Youth bureaus
- Civic groups
- Local and state colleges
- Public and/or private school principals/districts
- PTOs and other parent groups.

### PHASE 3:

#### EVALUATE CURRENT COMMUNITY CONDITIONS

A successful *CANARI* gives your action group a great deal of information to use for thinking critically and creatively about various sources of assistance and cooperation in your community. Of course, it also provides your group with insights into the interests of parents and children, your potential clients. Assuming your *CANARI* has been a success, use the responses to guide you through an assessment of community needs and resources to identify gaps in service. Such assessments help answer the following questions.

#### WHAT KIND OF EXPERIENCES DO WE WISH TO HELP CREATE?

Stories are often heard about planners of after-school programs who, for all their good intentions, wind up with what can only be regarded as waiting rooms or holding areas. In these programs, children

may be told to remain quiet and seated all afternoon while confined in an echoing cafeteria furnished only with hard tables and benches. These planners may have achieved children's safety, but at the cost of exploration, surprise, discovery, exercise, and the joy of play. Consider the effect of such bargaining on your efforts.

In addition to clear limits and expectations for behavior, consider school-agers' other developmental needs - a base of warmth and security; opportunities to develop initiative and independence; encouragement of kids' imagination and creativity.

Consider also that parents looking for a safe place, where their children will receive adequate supervision, also want a program that is affordable and which respects their values and cultural background.

When your action group agrees on the program's primary purposes, be certain that this mission takes into account the qualities in life you might wish for yourself and for your own children.

## **WHO WILL ATTEND OUR AFTER-SCHOOL PROGRAM?**

Information from the *CANARI* can help you determine what community you are serving and subsequently, your admission standards: children's ages and/or grade level, their places of residence, school of attendance, family size and income, and so on.

Your admission standards will partially control your total attendance figure, or program size, as will the availability of an affordable and appropriate location.

Since it is quite difficult for one caregiver to establish close ties or permit a range of activity with many children, plan for a lower caregiver/child ratio. No program should operate with only one caregiver. This jeopardizes both caregivers and children.

In either case, costs of hiring and training qualified caregivers have an impact on program size.

## **WHO WILL ADMINISTER OUR**

## **AFTER-SCHOOL PROGRAM?**

An effective administrator of an after-school program manages the business in accountable and dependable ways. An excellent one does so in creative, flexible, and responsive ways as well.

Will your action group have to establish a brand-new administrative structure? Not necessarily. Perhaps an existing child care program could be adapted or expanded to meet the demand for school-age care. An experienced administrative partner who can diversify may be appropriate.

After-school program administration can be one of the three following types:

### **A societal institution plays the dominant role.**

- Public school/school district
- Youth-serving agency (YMCA/YWCA, Campfire Girls, Boys and Girls Clubs)
- Local & state colleges
- Child care center
- Non-profit agency
- Private/parochial school

### **A community-based group plays the dominant role.**

- Parent board
- Chartered community-based organization
- Religious congregation
- County/municipal agency (Parks and Recreation Dept.)

### **Community and institutional groups collaborate in leadership.**

- Parent group & public/private school
- Youth-service agency & public school
- Local and state college & youth-service agency
- Congregation & parent group & private school
- Public/private school & county/municipal agency

If no existing agency appears as if it could effectively administer the program you envision, you may wish to embark upon the process of creating a new formal

organization.

To meet the federal and state legal requirements, your action group should consult an attorney with regard to:

- Incorporation of the organization
- Development of bylaws
- Application for tax-exempt status.

## WHAT LOCATION MAKES THE MOST SENSE?

Try to find locations close to or in the schools, because this makes children's daily commute much easier. Alternatively, try to find sites where parents driving home from work can conveniently pick their children up at day's end.

Some of the more common locations that meet these two criteria are:

- Community centers
- Youth centers
- County/municipal buildings (libraries, parks, museums)
- School buildings (public and private; including buildings that were formerly schools)
- Churches and synagogues
- Preschools and child care centers
- Commercially-zoned properties (storefront buildings, industrial parks).

To operate your program at a more desirable location and still keep costs down, you may wish to explore the option of *sharing space*.

Given the storage capacity and proper tools, caregivers and children can transform rooms and playgrounds used by others during school hours into an after-school program environment, often in as little as twenty minutes. However, unless a certain amount of the shared space remains permanently devoted to the after-school program, the staff and children tend to lose the sense that they really belong there, and this detracts from the overall caring experience.

Free or low-cost sites have an obvious appeal. Money saved on rent can be spent on caregiver compensation, supplies and equipment, off-site day trips, and so on.

Just remember that, as in all business, you usually get what you pay for. So, while strong support may arise for the most financially expedient solution, be sure to weigh all the advantages and disadvantages of each possible location before making the final decision.

If your program's administrator doesn't own the facilities, you'll have to prepare for the legal relationship between the program and the owner/lessor. It's likely you'll want to make sure that this relationship is clearly expressed in writing, possibly in the form of a *time, space and equipment (TSE) contract*. A TSE specifically spells out what caregivers, children, and the lessor may and may not do in the lessor's space. Always be sure to have an attorney review contracts and advise you as to your rights and obligations.

## DURING WHICH HOURS, DAYS, AND WEEKS WILL OUR PROGRAM OPERATE?

Your CANARI-based information can help you to determine the times when most families would like service made available. Always look for ways to make it available when they want it most. Parents' early morning job schedules may make a before-school program a must. For school holidays and summer vacations, some programs offer expanded service for 10 hours or more each day. Others schedule service during school holidays but don't operate in the summer. Certain programs schedule regular service even on snow days.

## HOW WILL CHILDREN GET TO AND FROM THE PROGRAM?

An important issue with the location of after-school programs is whether they are within the boundaries of the school district. Transportation concerns are at the root of this issue.

In looking at your own community, consider the following alternatives:

- Children walk, escorted by staff
- Public transportation, with adult supervision

- Parent car-pools
- Schools transport children
- Purchase or lease of van or bus
- Share vehicle with another agency
- Contract services of transportation.

## HOW WILL WE FINANCE OUR PROGRAM?

For most after-school programs, the bulk of direct funding comes from the family fees and/or contributions. Your *CANARI* information will provide you with a general sense of what parents may be willing to pay for their child to be enrolled in an after-school program.

Often, only 10 to 15 percent of those who indicate in the *CANARI* that they would utilize after-school program actually enroll their child when a program opens. Realizing this helps you determine the limits of your first year's **operating budget**, your projected income and expenditures during regular program operation. Your operating expenses include staff salaries and benefits (about 80% of your budget) as well as rent, equipment, materials, supplies, utilities, food, and administration.

Businesses incur many one-time expenses prior to operation. These **start-up costs** include building and renovation expenses, equipment and supply purchases, initial staff and caregiver compensation, and legal fees.

In addition, it's good business practice to maintain **reserve funds** sufficient to carry the program through the first six months of operation, a time during which under-enrollment may put a crimp in your operating budget. As you look for ways to reconcile the difference between possible expenses and the value of available resources, you may discover that **resource development** can supplement your projected costs.

Groups that are seeking to serve at-risk school-agers can explore the possibility of obtaining federal, local, and foundation grants. Figure 2 outlines the information these sources require.

On the other hand, it may not be more money you need but rather the types of

things that money can buy, so explore possibilities for **in-kind resources** that can bolster your bottom line. Collaboration with schools has become a time-honored method for obtaining in-kind resources. Your group may find schools to share group transportation, make low-cost meals available from school-run kitchens, assist with bulk purchases of supplies, contribute staff time for administrative paperwork, and so on. Local colleges may have in-kind resources to share.

## PHASE 4:

### PROGRAM DESIGN

You've come this far and are now ready to figure out what the children will actually do when they are in the program.

At this point unfortunately, the overriding tendency among after-school program planners is to say, "We're going to have a program, so we'll have to have some balls, headphones, puzzles...." You may start this way, but reserve some funds to purchase items requested by the kids. If you are not yet actually enrolling children, you can invite children whose parents expressed interest in after-school programs during the *CANARI* process. Ask the kids what they would like in a program. This may encourage the children to want to join your program. Keeping this in mind, successful planners will:

- Capitalize on specific children's individual interests
- Balance unstructured child-initiated activities into the overall plan
- Set reasonable limits that can be expressed clearly, consistently, and with respect
- Allow for spontaneity, flexibility, and serendipity within the limits set during pre-planning.

## PHASE 5:

### STAFF SELECTION

In a very real sense, the program *is* the

people whom you select to care for the children. Staff and caregiver compensation generally represent 70 to 85 percent of program expenditures, but account for nearly 100 percent of program excellence.

The first major hiring decision for a new program's administration, that of choosing the **program or site director**, will do much to determine how well or how poorly your new program will serve children. Schedule the recruitment and selection process so that your new director can join the team two to six months before the first day of planned program service.

An excellent candidate for this position will encourage your program to:

- Hire experienced caregivers who possess at least some training and a commitment to after-school programs
- Ensure good working conditions; breaks, paid time off, chances for meaningful staff input
- Consider hiring at least one full-time person per site
- Support paid caregivers with volunteer and low-cost aides, such as work-study students, foster grandparents, and Green Thumb volunteers.

## PHASE 6:

### BUILDING COLLABORATIONS

This phase of the process is actually a continuum; one that builds and maintains a collaborative spirit between your program and other key groups. These can range from a school board to a foundation to a labor union. Handled with skill, this process will give your program a "green light" from these groups - and keep the light green throughout the life of the program.

You can lay the groundwork for success early on by identifying opinion leaders and decision-makers sympathetic to your effort, some of whom you enlist in your action group. These people can help lobby others for you, putting their contacts and authority to work on your behalf.

## PHASE 7:

## GETTING APPROVAL

Usually it's necessary to attain a formal legal identity. The processes of incorporation, obtaining liability insurance, and applying for licenses and permits can be slow-going, so start early.

If your program requires formal approval from a school board or local zoning board, a public hearing may take place. In this event, publicize the hearing date and make sure supporters, especially parents who want the program approved, attend the hearing. Legal protection and financial responsibility will be the biggest concerns to those whom you approach for formal approval; anticipate their questions and know the answers.

To further demonstrate that you have carefully thought out and designed your program, prepare a written proposal. Depending on the requirements of the approving body or funding agency, the proposal may need to be fairly brief or quite extensive.

## PHASE 8:

### PUBLICIZE YOUR PROGRAM

A big part of gaining approval is generating positive public relations. Cultivate ties with the media from the earliest possible date. If your efforts are deemed newsworthy, local press, radio talk shows, and even television can give your program's profile a boost.

Over the long run, your best PR will be **word of mouth** from your satisfied parents and children. In the meantime, you can try other methods to increase community awareness:

- **Call and/or visit parents** who indicated interest on the *CANARI*. Keep a list of names and numbers of all those who made telephone inquiries and follow up.
- **Send fliers home** with children through schools and religious classes. Send fliers to social service agencies and doctor's offices, etc.
- **Put posters up** in supermarkets, shopping malls, churches and synagogues, schools, libraries, coin



laundries, adult education centers. Make them bright and easy to spot and read.

- **Invite local reporters** to visit and write about or videotape your program. Make sure you have clearance from parents before photographing their children.
- **Use radio and TV PSAs** (public service announcements). They're free!
- **Distribute brochures.** Make them simple and colorful. Their aim is to attract attention, pique interest, and present basic facts.
- **Hold an open house.** Choose a time that is convenient for your prospective users. Be sure to have the director and caregivers on hand and materials out for use, brochures to take home, etc.
- **Mail or distribute newsletters,** press releases and bulletins through 4-H Clubs, churches, Ys, or other community organizations; put announcements in some of these groups' publications.

## PHASE 9:

### ENROLL CHILDREN

By the time you begin your publicity campaign, have enrollment policies and procedures in place. Be sure your contact person can answer most common questions regarding the application process. Such questions include those regarding required family information, pre-registration fee or deposit, times for visits or interviews, notification of admission, waiting list

procedures, and trial enrollments.

To comply with your state's after-school program guidelines, distribute written materials to parents prior to enrollment, including a mission or goals statement, a description of the daily program, and policies regarding transportation, discipline policy, fee payment, emergencies and medical care procedures, sign-out procedures, etc. Combining pertinent information into a **policy handbook** can simplify the task of distributing these materials.

## PHASE 10:

### OPEN YOUR DOORS

A short while ago, a lack of after-school programs inspired you and your neighbors to take up the challenge of filling children's empty hours. Now, to fill that emptiness, you have created a caring program, soon to be filled with active, busy, thriving children. Take a quick inventory of the needs identified in your *CANARI* and how your program meets those needs:

- Legal and safety guidelines
- Sign-in and sign-out clearances and procedures
- Fee arrangements
- Materials purchased, costs, donations
- Smiles in place.

Now open those doors and enjoy your efforts!

**FIGURE 1**  
**CANARI**

*Before- and After-School Program Survey*

The \_\_\_\_\_ is currently studying the issue of before/after-school programs. Please help us assess the needs of our community by answering the following questions. Return one questionnaire per household to your child's teacher or school office by \_\_\_\_\_. All responses will be treated confidentially.

1. How many elementary school-aged children do you have who need care before and/or after-school?  
# of children \_\_\_\_\_

2. If an organized and supervised before/after school program was started in the area of your child's school, would you take advantage of it?  
YES \_\_\_\_ NO \_\_\_\_ Maybe \_\_\_\_

3. For every child that you would send to a before/after school program, check the grades in which they are currently enrolled by entering the number of children in each grade.  
K \_\_\_\_ 1 \_\_\_\_ 2 \_\_\_\_ 3 \_\_\_\_ 4 \_\_\_\_ 5 \_\_\_\_

4. When would you a program be needed?  
BEFORE SCHOOL \_\_\_\_ AFTER SCHOOL \_\_\_\_ BOTH \_\_\_\_ SUMMER \_\_\_\_

5. Collection of parent fees is necessary to provide funds for before/after school programs. Please indicate the maximum amount you would be willing to pay weekly per child.  
\$ 1-14 \_\_\_\_ \$ 15-19 \_\_\_\_ \$20-24 \_\_\_\_ \$25-29 \_\_\_\_  
\$30-34 \_\_\_\_ \$35-39 \_\_\_\_ \$40-45 \_\_\_\_ over \$45 \_\_\_\_

6. Do you currently have arrangements for before and/or after school care for elementary aged child(ren) on a regular basis? (This may include care provided by a neighbor, relative, day care center, older sibling, etc.) YES \_\_\_\_ NO \_\_\_\_

7. Are there preschool children in your home who will need before/after school program care within the next five years? YES \_\_\_\_ HOW MANY? \_\_\_\_ NO \_\_\_\_

8. Please indicate how important the following features are to you when considering a before/after school program. Check column (1) for VERY IMPORTANT, column (2) for SOMEWHAT IMPORTANT, or column (3) for NOT IMPORTANT.

	1	2	3
Cost	___	___	___
Transportation	___	___	___
Program Quality	___	___	___
Hours	___	___	___
Proximity to Home or School	___	___	___

PLEASE USE THE SPACE BELOW OR THE BACK OF THIS FORM FOR ANY CONCERNS NOT ADDRESSED BY THIS QUESTIONNAIRE. COMMENTS ARE ALSO WELCOME. THANK YOU VERY MUCH!

PLEASE RETURN THIS FORM PROMPTLY.

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## **FIGURE 2**

### *Funding Proposal Outline*

1. History & philosophy of the organization
2. Mission statement
3. Needs assessment
4. Program information
  - a) Age groups to be served
  - b) Objectives & methods
  - c) Location
  - d) Hours of operation
  - e) Accountability for day to day operation
5. Financial information
  - a) Costs and sources of funds
  - b) Projected annual revenue & expenses
  - c) Liability coverage
6. Parental involvement
7. Evaluation of the program

## FURTHER READINGS

*Child Care Information Exchange* [periodical]. Roger Neugebauer, editor. Subscriptions available through Child Care Information Exchange, Box 2890, Redmond, WA 98073.

*Partnerships: Solving the School Age Child Care Crisis* [25 minute video]. 1988. Available through Day Care Association of Montgomery County, Inc., Southeastern Pennsylvania SACC Project, 601 Knight Road, Ambler, PA 19002. Phone (215) 643-0569.

National School-Age Care Alliance Standards. Available through NSACA, 1137 Washington Street, Boston, MA 02215. Phone: (617) 298-5012.

Parents United for Child Care, *How to Start a Before School Program: a Manual for Parents*. Available through Parents United for Child Care, 30 Winter Street, 7th floor, Boston, MA. 02108 (617) 426-8288.

Richards, Mary McDonald. *Before & After School Programs: A Start-Up and Administrative Manual*. 1991. Available through School-Age NOTES, P.O. Box 40205, Nashville, TN 37204.

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School-Age NOTES. *The Complete School-Age Child Care Resource Kit*. Available through School-Age NOTES, P.O. Box 40205, Nashville, TN 37204.

Sciarra, Dorothy J. and Anne G. Dorsey. *Developing and Administering a Child Care Center*. 1990. Albany, NY: Delmar Publishers, Inc.

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